

Brethren Evangelist

"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life."—Jesus

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Special Announcement

Please turn to page 14 and read the publisher's announcements. Read all the items. They may prove helpful to you. You will find there some things you ought to know.

Where is the Trouble?

In nearly all the churches, serious people are earnestly asking themselves and each other the question why in this age of universal progress, the army of the Lord, differing in this particular from all other institutions, seems alone to be in full retreat. Education, material development, science, political expansion, every enterprise in fact in which the world of thinking and active men are interested, are making giant strides forward, achieving great conquests, accumulating vast results, opening up splendid vistas of destiny. Religion alone, as represented by the churches, utters a discordant note in the midst of the universal jubilation. On all sides we hear the wail of its jeremiads. Bishops of the Methodist fraternity, Presbyters, Synods, Associations, Conventions, all the venerable and respectable ecclesiastical bodies, tell the sorrowful tale of interrupted progress, retrogression, reduced numbers, subtraction of influence, emptying of churches. Even the most fortunate are by no means making that progress which is at all commensurate with the great cause of the world's salvation,—such progress as reason would expect for institutions having eternal life and divine glory for their ultimate ends. The most penetrating intellects in all the churches are earnestly searching for the hidden canker. Legion is the name of the malady, and legion are the remedies proposed. Elaborate articles in religious papers discuss the problem, and after everything is said, the problem remains. One writer insists that it is because the church has drifted away from the poor, that it caters more and more to the rich, and well favored in society. To please the latter, fine churches are built, expensive and elaborate music is provided, and silver tongued orators are employed. Another writer thinks the trouble lies in the creeds, all man made, and all containing some things which no rational man can believe. Still another inclines to the opinion that the great flood of periodical literature, and

particularly the Sunday newspaper, is to be blamed for the falling off in church attendance and the decline of popular interest in religion. Other contributing causes are mentioned, the lukewarmness of church people, their evident or at least apparent indifference to the spiritual welfare of others, their hostility to self denial in their own lives, and the eagerness with which they pursue money making.

Perhaps no single one of these things ought to be charged with the comparatively poor success of religion in later years, but suppose we take them all together, suppose we group all these moral and spiritual maladies, and do we not then have a combination of sufficient potency to accomplish the defeat of almost any cause, human or divine? That they all exist in a most active and pernicious persistency no one can deny, and that they cut out plenty of work for the pastors is also manifest. Every pastor ought to study the conditions prevailing in his community, and thereby familiarize himself with the forces that are hindering the Lord's work in his especial field. Suppose you tabulate them and hang them up in your study. Take those we have mentioned in this article, add such others as you may find among your people, make a neat list of them, and like a good old King of Israel spread them before the Lord, and begin your warfare against them. Rebuke, reprove, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine. It is the preacher who must lift up the standard against satan. He should do it intelligently. The adversary is wise in his work, and attends to particular things. On the same ground he must be met. He will come to your church to hear your beautiful oratory that means nothing in particular, but if you put your finger on his work, here, there, wherever his hand may be manifest, if you expose his wiles and uncover his devices, he will tremble with the apprehension of defeat and discomfiture.

Pastors must be discreet in the manner of doing this kind of indispensable duty. It is personal work, and comes in contact with that sensitiveness which is characteristic of our human nature. A scolding pastor will accomplish little. A wise, tactful, tender, yet firm and uncompromising attitude in the pastor when dealing with these and similar problems will sooner or later yield the very best results.